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AUTHOR Fagan, William T.
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ABSTRACT

The message about general literacy standards in Canada (as reported in the Southam Literacy Survey) is that approximately five million Canadians are illiterate. The validity of this message must be challenged because a group of middle-class Canadians with middle-class values established the criteria for being "literate" and felt that all other Canadians must subscribe to their value system. A big question is also how literacy levels relate to the economy. While figures for the rate of illiteracy in Canadian prisons is often placed as high as 80%, it must be remembered that the prison setting is not an ideal setting for literacy development or academic upgrading, and that a more significant factor that must be considered by those who believe that literacy automatically leads to rehabilitation is the lack of definite goals by prisoners. The messengers are generally newspaper reporters, writers in popular magazines, business officials, and politicians. The first responsibility for receivers of messages is to put the problem of literacy in context. Literate persons also have the responsibility to produce clarity of print and to negotiate via print. Literacy is not in a crisis situation, and the educational system is not falling apart. However, some problem areas do need to be addressed, and these include accountability, qualifications of literacy experts, adult literacy versus children's literacy development, and models and definitions of literacy. (Eighteen references are attached.) (RS)

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LITERACY MESSAGES, THE MESSENGER
AND THE RECEIVER

William T. Fagan, Director
The Reading and Language Center
1-135 Education North
The University of Alberta
EDMONTON, Alberta
T6G 2G5

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NOTE: Even within the age of lasers, it is still
not possible to capture in writing the exact nature
of an oral presentation, especially when audiovisual
media are used. Consequently, this printed document
represents a suggested framework for my oral presen-
tation.

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Literacy Messages, The Messenger and the Receiver

In keeping with the theme of today's session (Communication) I want to explore with you some implications of communication about literacy via print. Let us look at a very simplified model of communication and address the three basic components:

1. What messages are we receiving regarding literacy?
2. Who are the messengers?
3. Who are the receivers and what are their responsibilities?

The Messages

Messages About General Literacy Standards

Do these messages indicate that we have a literacy crisis in Canada? Or is there a problem regarding literacy,.

In order to answer these questions, we must first decide how valid the messages are, and who is the messenger.

With respect to the validity of the message I have written two articles questioning some of the data of the Southam Newspaper Literacy Study. Since then similar articles or reviews have also been authored by Dr. Stan Straw, University of Manitoba, Dr. Victor Froese, University of British Columbia and Dr. John Willinsky, University of Calgary. Perhaps someone is ready to conclude that there is a Westerner conspiracy against the Southam Literacy Report.

In an article published in the Alberta Teachers' Association Journal (Volume 70, May/June, 1990) in regard to the conclusion by the Southam Literacy Survey that approximately 5 million Canadians were illiterate, I made these comments:

It is important to consider the criteria on which the 24 percent illiteracy was decided by the Southam personnel. There were two forms to the test - a ten-item form and a fourteen-item form, with a four-item overlap. The test forms were not equivalent according to the results. Of those Canadians who answered the questions on Form One, 20 percent were considered illiterate, while 28 percent of those taking Form Two of the test were placed in that category. To resolve that dilemma, the authors merely decided to average both percentages, and arrive at a 24 percent figure. There were over sixty items altogether in the survey, but only a form consisting of ten items and a form consisting of fourteen items were used to determine the number of illiterates in Canada. A person who scored seven out of ten or fewer items on Form One and a person who scored ten out of fourteen or fewer items on Form Two, were declared illiterate. In reality, the ability to answer just one item separated the literate from the illiterate.

The content of each form was considered "functional", that is, of relevance to those taking the test. A panel of twenty-four people (none from Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island or Manitoba), the vast majority of whom held

professional or executive jobs, decided what items had relevance for all Canadians. People were given facsimiles of real-life reading tasks, and they were asked questions regarding traffic signs, instructions on a medicine bottle, prices on a menu, a social security card, a driver's license, a telephone bill, and setting up a meeting. When did you (the readers of this article) last circle a traffic sign (I don't mean drive around it, but draw a ring around it)? When did you last circle the expiry date on a facsimile of your driver's license? When did you last go to a restaurant and before your bill arrived, add up the cost of your meal from the menu (assuming the menu was left with you), subtract that from the money you had and calculate your change? When did you last analyze a plan of the physical layout of a room to discover information about a proposed meeting? (Four of the ten items concerned setting up a meeting room.) How relevant was this meeting task to a Newfoundland fisherman or an Alberta laborer?

Thus a group of middle-class Canadians with middle-class values felt that all other Canadians must subscribe to their value system, even if tasks such as accessing information about a meeting from a room plan were totally irrelevant to their lives. In fact, it would have been simple to ask the people when they had last sought information on a meeting, if they had a driver's license or went to restaurants. Francis Kazemek, a literacy expert in the United States, would question whether it was ethical for

a group of individuals with middle-class values to determine what all Canadians should be able to read and write.

What have been some messages gleaned from the Southam Report? Willinsky states that the blame for the low-literacy standards in Canada is placed on Newfoundlanders, immigrants, and workers. He indicates that there is a subtle message undermining Newfoundlanders, a message that confirms an already common stereotype of people from that province. With respect to immigrants, Willinsky says that the report "contributes to further closing Canadian borders to imported and expensive 'illiteracy woes'" (p. 7). Regarding workers, the report states that "Two million workers across Canada are trapped in a tightening vice between their own illiteracy and a relentless rise in job demands for reading, writing, and using numbers" (p. 37). Willinsky points out that these workers are "blamed for showing little interest in raising their literacy level. 'Fewer than 10 per cent say they're even likely to take remedial instruction'" (p. 7).

Politicians and writers have capitalized on the Report and given their interpretation.

Senator Fairbairn tells us that:

The illiterate are mothers running dreadful risks in their homes because they cannot read the labels on dangerous substances or the instructions to deal with accidents to themselves or to their children.

The illiterate are farmers, failing themselves, their families and their land because they cannot keep up in an increasingly complex and technical industry where, to keep abreast of change, you must read and understand.

Writer June Callwood describes illiteracy in this way:

Loss of hope for oneself is a descent into dissolution without end. It causes men to rage in fury and women to wound themselves. People who can't read come readily to view themselves as worthless junk, and many feel they must grab what they can out of life. Canada's prisons are full of men and women who can't read.

Those who are prepared to preach gloom and doom and holler about our literacy crisis will see the more recent release on literacy standards by Statistics Canada as adding fuel to their fires.

The Statistics Canada Survey didn't classify people as literate and illiterate since the authors believed that functional literacy does not fall neatly into categories. Yet the Survey established four categories for reporting the recalls: Categories or Levels 1, 2, 3, 4. The items across the categories were ranked in order of difficulty and given a designated number that marked the difficulty of that item. The score was the number of the most difficult item a person could answer - except not so; a person only got the highest score if his/her responses were consistent, which seems to mean you couldn't have too many gaps in the sequence of items correct. Thus correct responses to higher item numbers without correct responses on a pattern (a pattern is never clearly spelled out) of lower order numbers is considered a fluke.

Yet Jones from Statistics Canada admits that prior familiarity with the information in the test passage was not measured. A person who got higher order numbers correct

without a pattern leading up to this would actually be skilled in using his/her prior knowledge, which is part of schema theory and is inherent today in the knowledge of experts in the area of reading. Furthermore, research by Sticht, Chang, and Wood point out the importance of job knowledge. They showed that when job knowledge was taken into account, the estimate of general reading skills for job literacy functioning could be reduced by as many as five grade levels - from grade 11 to grade 6. Thus, if I had a grade 6 level of reading and a knowledge of the job I was to perform, I could function as well as you with a grade 11 level of reading and no job knowledge.

Finally, the Statistics Canada Survey, like the Southam Report states, "that it measured functional literacy, that is, "the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community" (Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, Statistics Canada, updated, p. 1). Only a few tasks are described. One at Level 1, for example, asks a person to look over a grocery shopping list and identify all the items on the list that were in an ad from a supermarket. Tell me, when last did you look over a shopping list that someone gave you and check of items that were listed in a supermarket ad?

Tell me something else, when last did you meet an illiterate person, that is, someone who had lost hope for him/herself, someone who had descended into dissolution

without end, men who raged in fury, women who wounded themselves, and all who felt they were worthless junk, and who felt that they must grab what they can out of life? When did you meet 10-100-1000 of such people? Yet, according to crisis reports, there are between 3 and 5 million of them in Canada or about one in every 4 people.

Willinsky points out some of the more sobering data from the Southam Report that shows that the illiterates identified in that study are not without hope.

	Literates	Illiterates
Read daily paper	62%	52%
Editorial page	57%	47%
Nat'l/Intern'l news	75%	65%
Sports page	54%	50%
Av. time spent	51 min.	49 min.
Read/looked through book (6 mon.)	86%	53%
Letters (>1 page - month)	66%	44%
Enjoy reading more than TV	39%	25%
Keep up with gov't affairs	52%	44%
Reading not a problem	92%	75%

Do we, or do we not have a literacy crisis in Canada? Willinsky best sums up the situation - "The ultimate danger of the crisis syndrome ... is its tendency to demean both citizen and literacy. This is an impoverished way of stirring up policy makers and the public to begin building a better education in literacy" (p. 13).

Literacy and the Economy

The Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy was founded in 1985. A major aim of this organization is to promote an awareness of the impacts of low literacy levels on participation and functioning in the workplace (Ritts,

1986). According to the Task Force the direct cost of illiteracy to business amounts to \$4.2 billion per year, while indirect costs to society reach \$10.7 billion a year (Chang, 1990). "Business leaders are wondering if Canada can remain competitive in the international marketplace with workers who are unable to keep pace with the growing demand for literacy of all types in the workplace" (Change, 1990, p. 6).

A big question is how literacy levels relate to the economy. Research (Fagan, 1989a; Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986; Sticht, 1988/89) has shown that there is not a high relationship between how well a person does on the type of reading test administered in school and level of attainment on reading tasks of a work related nature. Data on just what level or degree of literacy is needed to function in the workplace are just not available. Ritts (1986) tells us that in a report to the provincial minister of labour by the Ontario Department of Health in January, 1986, while it was acknowledged that "workers' illiteracy is a major contributing factor to workplace accidents", there were no "hard, quantitative data" regarding this problem (p. 57).

Mikulecky and Diehl (1980) showed that the level of literacy depends on the nature of the occupation. Sticht (1988/89) reveals that several hundred thousand functionally illiterate members of the Armed Forces during the Second World and Vietnam Wars and the years 1976-80, who ordinarily would be rejected from the Armed Forces because of their

low-literacy standards, were accepted either because of a shortage of personnel or because of a miscalculation of their scores. Records show that 80 percent of these performed 80-95 percent as well as those who had passed the literacy (aptitude) test.

Have you ever considered what would happen if someone challenged the validity of test scores to determine whether a particular level of achievement was necessary to function in a particular job/occupation/profession?

Several such cases have been reported in the United States (Mikulecky and Diehl, in Mikulecky, 1990). In all cases the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. In the first such case (Griggs versus Duke Power Company), the court stated "that literacy can only be used as a screening mechanism for employment when a clear case can be made that literacy tests reflect actual job demands" (p. 30).

Literacy and Prison Inmates

While figures for the rate of illiteracy in prisons are often placed as high as 80%; it must be remembered that not all prisoners are illiterate.

Much of my research has been with inmates in a provincial jail.

I will just share two points with you.

1. The prison setting is not an ideal setting for literacy development or academic upgrading. Many believe otherwise, thinking that prisoners don't have to worry about financial obligations, lack of support

from their families or loved ones, babysitting services, transportation, etc.. The prison environment is not without negative circumstances. Money becomes significant in that prisoners who attend classes receive a lower allowance than those who opt for other prison tasks such as laundry or kitchen help. The allowance does not usually cover the cost of cigarettes. Some prisoners (those from the active treatment unit) were on medication and felt they didn't have the energy to learn. Those with histories of alcohol and drug abuse found it difficult to learn. We still know so little about the effects on learning of extended use of drugs and alcohol. This doesn't just apply to prisoners but to many of our youth as well. Peer pressure was also significant within the prison environment. One prisoner who preferred to be "left alone" developed a "hands-off" image by physical assault, if necessary to maintain his image as "tough guy". He indicated there was no way he would jeopardize this image by attending a literacy class. Others merely bowed to peer pressure and were not willing to risk the taunts of other inmates by attending what they referred to as the "dummy" class.

Other interferences with opportunities for education involve security risks which prevent certain inmates from attending classes, especially classes of a vocational/technical nature, periodic interruptions

(dentist, doctor, lawyer, or caseworker appointments), lack of punctuality due to restricted mobility without supervision, security checks, delayed meals, and transfer to other institutions (Davidson, 1988; Nixon and Bumbarger, 1983).

2. Perhaps a more significant factor that must be considered by those who believe that literacy automatically leads to rehabilitation, is the lack of definite goals by prisoners. Of the prisoners I worked with, 16 were enrolled in a literacy/upgrading program. Over one-third indicated they had no goals. The goals of the others were usually expressed in terms of occupations and ranged from laborer to professional. However, as the commitment to realizing a goal was pursued, the majority of the prisoners admitted they were not convinced they could attain their goals. The one goal that was uppermost in each person's mind was getting out of jail, and each named the exact day and sometimes the hour of the release date. One person expressed it this way: "When I get up in the morning and even the last thing before I go to sleep at night, I think about getting out of here. I count off the days. I go to class but most of my energy (mental) is taken up with being on the outside". Yet all but one were repeat offenders, some having been in jail off and on for ten years. They had no definite plan for staying out of jail. They did not see a direct connection

between literacy competency and improvement in their situation on the outside. One prisoner explained: "Well, I really can't see that literacy is going to help me. You see, I've been on my own since I was thirteen, right? I'm still on my own. I don't have nothing, nothing really planned, nothing really going for me when I get out. Like, I don't have a permanent address in the first place. I don't have very much clothes and I don't have much money, so I really don't know what the future will bring. If it's better than now it's going to be a matter of luck, not literacy.". It seemed as if the prisoners viewed their release time as a respite before serving a next sentence.

The Messenger(s)

Messages only make sense when we understand who the messengers are. The messengers are generally newspaper reporters, writers in popular magazines, business officials and politicians. All represent middle or upper middle class Canadians.

Business officials, of course, are concerned about profits. A lack of skilled labour is going to mean a decline in profits. Whether lack of skilled labour is due to an illiterate population is another point. In the newspaper article "Skilled People Lacking" Bob Saari, manager of the Canadian Manufacturers Association in Alberta said "We have a major problem in this province because we have no manufacturing curriculum" - note, not because we have too

few literates, but no curriculum for training skilled workers.

Business also stands to make a profit in providing technical materials for literacy programs. Yet such equipment may actually deprive children of literacy. During my research I spoke with a single mother who was attending a literacy program in inner-city Edmonton. She wanted to learn to read to help her son, now in grade 3, who was doing very well and was actually helping her. One day she was really depressed. Her son had been selected as a candidate to join the computer club - with a fee. She didn't have enough money for a fee left over from her welfare cheque and wondered what would happen to her son. I wonder too, especially if we believe that attitude and motivation are key to learning and that 8 year olds cannot understand the economic worlds of adults.

Politicians always have their own agendas. It may be to embarrass the party in power, if one is a member of the opposition, or to win electoral support whether an individual is opposition or government. The goal is usually one of getting on the bandwagon.

With regard to reporters, Willinsky states that the Southam reports on the survey data represent "a well-planned and commissioned story to help the newspaper's readers and its own future by constructing a literacy crisis" (p. 6).

It seems that those who talk crisis have something to gain for themselves. And finally we have those who travel

the country or continent and for a handsome fee, will tell us that there is a literacy crisis. Have you ever wondered how ironic it is that a speaker charging a \$5000 - \$10,000 honorarium, will tell a group of literates (who supposedly read news reports) that Canadians are illiterate. What solutions do they have? Usually it is for someone to put pressure on someone else to spend more money on literacy. Yet the amount of money spent on schooling over the past 50 years has risen dramatically, yet about one-third of those who begin school drop out before they complete high school.

The Receivers

Now we are getting closer to home. Only we can take responsibility as the receivers of the messages.

Literacy in Context

Our first responsibility as receiver is to put the problem of literacy in context. Literacy does not make the person and without literacy we would not all be naked.

Let's look at the literacy data in a more sobering light.

Do you still feel literacy is still the crisis that the messengers would have us believe?

Do you think that for people who are coping with poor physical health, poor mental health, sexual abuse or its aftermath, suicidal tendencies, alcoholism, drug addiction, little or no food, possibility of no place to live, no job, and discrimination, especially faced by women, are going to put literacy as a priority in their lives?

Do you believe that illiteracy causes all these problems? If you do you are not alone, unfortunately.

Kate Fillion writes in Canadian Living about an illiterate adult who became literate and authored a book on her life. An excerpt from the book states:

"Every month (the government) sent a cheque, and my dad cashed it to buy beer. He made me clean the house. I felt like a slave. One day, my dad took me to the doctor. He did not tell me why. The doctor tied my tubes and burned them, so I can never have a baby. Now it is against the law to do what they did to me."

Are we to conclude that the author suffered so because she was illiterate or because her father was illiterate or both, or is it a case of Fillion's failing to understand the relationship between social and academic conditions? We have to stop forming simplistic cause-effect relationships.

Of course it is easy to find correlations between illiteracy and other social and economic problems (poverty, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, hunger, crime, etc.). But we can also show correlations between high levels of literacy and social and economic problems.

Perhaps our first sobering interpretation of the messages we are receiving regarding the literacy crisis is that lack of literacy skills is only one of many social and economic problems faced by many people across Canada. It doesn't make sense to address one problem independently of another. To do so actually reflects a very early stage of human development according to psychologist Jean Piaget - that is, out of sight, out of mind.

The Literate: Look to Ourselves or Models of Literacy

Surely if we are encouraging the development of literacy we must be able to point to literacy models that those who are aspiring towards literacy can emulate. And surely we, the receivers of the literacy messages, should reflect those models.

How do we cope with messages of print?

For what purposes do we use literacy?

First, we are consumers of print. What literate behaviors should we demonstrate as literate people, as consumers of print? Certainly we should be expected to analyze data carefully, to determine its validity, and to understand the conclusions in terms of the writer who presented them and the data on which they are based. As I indicated earlier, several articles have been published that have questioned the Southam Study data on literacy standards. Yet so called literate people (educators, politicians, public servants) continue to quote the findings of this study as indicative of a literacy crisis in Canada. Perhaps each of these people, who themselves are messengers, have a hidden agenda for doing so. If they don't then the only other conclusion is that they are gullible consumers of print, and that is not a characteristic of a literate person.

Another responsibility we have as literate people is to produce clarity of print.

Is our writing always clear and easy to follow? If we need to use technical terms, are these supported by the context so that there is a sufficient base for the reader to understand.

We also have a responsibility for negotiating via print. These days we hear a lot about literacy as power. It is sad actually how educators, in particular, latch on to a few catchy terms and use them continuously without question. The notion of power (or empowerment which sounds even better) is often used simplistically to mean that literacy provides a key to accomplish things. This is true to a point. But you can't write a letter tomorrow to tell someone he/she is fired, or to state you have taken over the top job in your establishment, or to secure a reduction in taxation from your local municipality. You don't even have the power to insist that your letter will be published in your local paper. Power always involves power brokers. Power, whether through literacy or otherwise is not attained unilaterally except through some sort of manipulation (such as taking over control of a company) or through revolution.

Power via literacy is generally attained through negotiation. I write, you entertain my request, you accede (with or without conditions). If you decide to block my

request, then all the literacy in the world is not going to change that.

I have given you information on the messages about literacy that are common today; I have tried to help you understand the messenger; and I have attempted to have you understand your role (i) as a receiver of messages, (ii) as an initiator of print, whereby you become a messenger, and (iii) as a negotiator via print.

The situation portrayed by the messages, the intent of the messenger, and you, the receiver, as a consumer, initiator, and negotiator of print can all constitute problems. So why do we feel that the problem conveyed in the messages I pointed out earlier is the only one to address. And indeed that problem has been addressed in numerous ways and with varying degrees of success.

Further Direction

I do not believe that literacy is in a crisis situation and that the education system is falling apart. In spite of my questioning the results of the Southam data, these data do show that the younger people, or more recent graduates are higher in terms of literacy competency than older generations. I think that most of our school systems and teachers are doing an excellent job under trying conditions and this is what should occasionally capture the headlines. Just recently I spoke to a consultant within the Edmonton Public School System who indicated she was holding inservice for teachers at 7:30 in the morning. When I queried the

early hour, she replied that the teachers requested it and were often too busy at lunch hour to attend. Some, who taught at two schools spent their lunch hour travelling from one school to another. I am sure the dedication and commitment of this consultant and teachers are not confined to the Edmonton Public School System but may be found in school systems all across the country.

However, we would be complacent and remiss in our profession if we did not realize that there are always problems in education and there is always need for improvement.

Below are some areas we need to address as we search for solutions to the problems.

Accountability. We hear many people proposing solutions to the literacy problem, people telling us they have found the answer. And many of these ideas/plans are being implemented. What we don't have to go along with these is a system of accountability. What should the results of these solutions be and when should they occur? I once heard promoters of an adult literacy project judge its successfulness by the number of brochures handed out in a shopping mall.

We must focus on providing the best possible programs for those adults who are voluntarily coming forward requesting help in improving their literacy skills and forget trying to embarrass the whole country by preaching that we are an illiterate nation. Rather than continuously

hearing testimonials about the tragic lives of adult learners, wouldn't it be great if we could hear more testimonials by these learners about the success of the programs they have attended, and the fulfillment of their literacy goals, thereby saying that they no longer have need of a literacy program.

Qualified personnel. Why is it that so many people feel qualified as literacy experts? Would you claim to be a podiatrist because you learned to walk? Would you claim to be a speech specialist because you learned to speak? Then why do people claim to be reading and writing specialists because they learned to read and write?

School boards have a grave responsibility in this regard. Those trained as teachers of high school chemistry should not be teaching language arts in grade six. Those who have not been trained as language arts teachers should not be teaching language arts - period. Good classroom teachers should not be rewarded by being appointed as the reading or language arts specialist or consultant unless they have specialized in the study of reading and writing through courses at a master's level.

Universities have a grave obligation. In conjunction with provincial governments and teachers' associations, they provide a plan for what qualifies as a good teacher. Should not the ability to teach reading and writing effectively be part of that plan? How many teacher education programs require prospective teachers to take courses in reading and

writing or language arts? A new B.Ed. program to be implemented at the University of Alberta in 1991 will require a minimum of 36 hours in language arts instruction over four years.

Children versus adults. Who is responsible for whom? Certainly School Acts point out very clearly the responsibility of school boards for children, who are defined generally as being between the ages 6-18. Sticht (1988/89) states "that children are not just little adults, and that adults are grown-up children" (p. 85). We are being told that over 30 percent of the school age population are dropping out or growing up each year. Literacy is becoming polarized over whether it focusses on school age children or adults. People from both camps must work together for a solution. Questions that need to be addressed are: What is the responsibility of society to teach adults to read and write if they have already been given this right for 12 years? What are the responsibilities of schools to ensure that they learn to read and write within those 12 years? At what point in a student's school career should the approach to literacy become more adult-like and less child-like? At that point in time should special attempts at literacy instruction be postponed until these students are adults - sort of like a credit that can be cashed in later?

What is literacy/a model of literacy/research on literacy. The views of many people about literacy have not changed since the days of the slate. Literacy is still

considered as learning to pronounce words, answer questions, form letters and words, arrange these in connected sentences etc.. Many proponents of adult literacy either adopt the same model as is used to understand literacy for children, or focus on functional literacy, which as I pointed out in an earlier part of this talk is far from functional. We need to rethink literacy in this day and age of lasers. Gordon Wells has produced one model, which he refers to simply as "Ways of Engaging with Texts". I have produced a model which I term the "Trait-State" model, which arose from my study of mental and personality disorders, when I began to realize that you can't divorce the person and the person's circumstances from literacy. In an indirect way I have been using this model to help you understand the messages, the messengers, and receivers in a communication context. As part of this model we also cannot ignore that literacy cannot be divorced from all other aspects of a child's or adult's life and that economic and social conditions are often formidable obstacles to literacy development.

In conjunction with this point, the role of schools needs to be examined and perhaps redefined. At the present time schools are becoming a dumping ground for all of society's ills.

Finally, in this day of lasers we need to provide more solid data on how to solve the literacy problem. McGuire, in an editorial in the Alberta Journal of Educational Research tells us there are about 500 serious, continuous and

systematic researchers in education in Canada - that is, for all of education. Let us suppose that one-twentieth of these are in the area of literacy - that is just 25, and more than likely this is an overestimation. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development (Spring, 1990), there are approximately 180 food banks, 1100 emergency grocery programs, and 400 meal programs in Canada attempting to address the poverty issue in Canada. In terms of resources invested, can we really claim that the problem of low-literacy standards is really a priority in this country?

Since each situation or setting is unique in terms of the particular individuals, the value placed on literacy and the support or interference of social, economic, and political factors, trying to cope with the problem of low-literacy standards is really a gamble.

We must know when to "hold up" and not jump on bandwagons and panaceas.

We must know when to "fold up" - when a program or proposed solution or appointed personnel does not work out.

"Know when to walk away" and postpone special programming when there is no perceived benefit.

"Know when to run" from those who tell us that all our attempts for enhancing literacy development are leading to disaster and crisis.

The "secret of survival" is knowing what to throw away and knowing what to keep. This actually has been the gist of my talk. I hope that as receivers of literacy messages,

including mine, you are more discerning about what to throw away and what to keep from the different messages about literacy that you hear.

Kenny Rogers says this much better in song. However, unlike the ending of the song I believe there is a lot to hope for and I wish you well in the literacy challenges of your respective jurisdictions.

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